



# TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE A SCHOLARSHIP?

K-12 students from families with limited financial resources and income up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible to receive a tax credit scholarship. Returning scholarship recipients can make up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Before April 1, priority will be given to students from each of the following categories:

- » Received a tax credit scholarship last school year (Category 0); OR
- » Members of a household whose previous year's total annual income does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level (\$49,025 for a family of 4 (2021)); OR
- » Reside within a focus district; OR
- » Received a scholarship from a scholarship granting organization during the previous school year; OR
- » Siblings of a current scholarship recipient.

After April 1, all other qualifying students will be considered for scholarships, subject to availability of funds.

### WHAT IS A FOCUS DISTRICT?

Focus districts are public school districts that have a school where at least one subgroup of students performs in the bottom 10% statewide or a graduation rate of less than 60%. A list of focus districts can be found [here](#).

### WILL ADDITIONAL PRIORITY/WEIGHTING BE GIVEN TO THOSE STUDENTS WHO FULFILL MORE THAN ONE OF THE PRIORITY CATEGORIES?

Additional priority will be given to students who received a tax credit scholarship last school year. Those students will be placed in Category 0. Next, students meeting at least **one (1) qualification for Category 1** will be considered, followed by all other applicants. No additional priority is given to students who meet more than one qualification or category. All applications will be reviewed based on the reservation date and time, and reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis.

### WHAT HAPPENS IF THERE IS NOT ENOUGH FUNDING TO SUPPORT ALL SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS?

Applications will be reviewed based on the reservation date and time stamp and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds at your school of choice.

If after April 1 there exist Category 0 and Category 1 students/applications who applied before April 1 and have not yet received scholarships, state regulations require that these students be served (subject to availability of funds) before Category 2 students and/or priority group students who applied after April 1.

### IF A STUDENT RECEIVED A SCHOLARSHIP LAST YEAR, DO THEY NEED TO REAPPLY?

Yes. Scholarships are awarded for one school year and students will have to reapply annually.

### CAN STUDENTS APPLY TO MORE THAN ONE SCO?

Students can apply to multiple SGOs but can only accept one scholarship through this program. If a student accepts a scholarship from another SGO after applying to Empower Illinois, the family must notify Empower Illinois within three (3) business days. Failure to do so may affect the student's future eligibility for Empower Illinois awards.

## **HOW IS THE AMOUNT OF A SCHOLARSHIP DETERMINED? WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM SCHOLARSHIP A STUDENT CAN RECEIVE?**

In order to qualify for a scholarship, a student's family will have to give official documentation of their household income (please note schools may opt-in to award partial scholarships, which may change a student's scholarship amount).

- » For students whose household income is less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, the scholarship will be 100% of tuition and necessary fees;
- » For students whose household income is between 185% and 250%, scholarships will be 75% of tuition and necessary fees; and
- » For students whose household income is between 250% and 400%, scholarships will be 50% of tuition and necessary fees.

The maximum scholarship equals tuition and necessary fees or the statewide average operating expense per student, whichever is lower.

- » For the 2023-2024 school year, the statewide average operating expense per student is \$16,028.65.
- » Students identified as gifted and talented can receive up to \$17,631.52 annually.
- » Students identified as English Language Learners can receive up to \$19,234.38 annually.
- » Students identified as eligible to receive services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act can receive up to \$32,057.30 annually.
- » The scholarships are commitments for one year.

## **WHAT DOCUMENTATION WILL BE REQUIRED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS TO RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIPS?**

Students eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will need to provide a copy of either their current Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Service Plan (ISP) from their school.

## **WILL SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES BE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A STUDENT'S LOCAL DISTRICT OR THEIR NEW SCHOOL?**

Your local district is still responsible for offering services but the individual right to services (from the district) is not as strong as it would be if a child remained in public school. We recommend you talk with the private school you are interested in having your child attend in order to get a better sense of what services might be available to your child before making any decision.

## **WHAT TYPE OF EXPENSES ARE COVERED THROUGH TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS?**

Tuition and necessary fees for any qualified non-public school in Illinois are covered through tax credit scholarships. The scholarship cannot be used to cover transportation expenses.

## **HOW IS A SCHOLARSHIP PAYMENT MADE?**

Scholarship payments will be made directly to the qualified school where the student is enrolled.

## **IF A STUDENT DECIDES TO TRANSFER SCHOOLS MID-YEAR, WILL THE SCHOLARSHIP TRANSFER WITH THE STUDENT?**

The scholarship may follow the student if scholarship funds are available at the new school. Please keep in mind that funds may not follow the student from one school to another, if funds are designated to a specific school or network based on donor intent.

## HOW IS HOUSEHOLD INCOME CALCULATED? WHAT ARE THE HOUSEHOLD INCOME LIMITS?

For 2023-2024 scholarships, your most recent federal adjusted gross income is the basis. This amount does not include the income of children under 18 attending elementary or secondary school on a full-time basis. Foster children are deemed to have a household income that does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level. If you are using 2022 income documents, the 2022 FPL Chart can be found on [our website](#).

### 2021 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Chart

Household Members	185% FPL	250% FPL	300% FPL
1	\$23,828	\$32,200	\$38,640
2	\$32,227	\$43,550	\$52,260
3	\$40,626	\$54,900	\$65,880
4	\$49,025	\$66,250	\$79,500
5	\$57,424	\$77,600	\$93,120
6	\$65,823	\$88,950	\$106,740
7	\$73,334	\$100,300	\$120,360
8	\$81,621	\$111,650	\$133,980

\*Note: If there are more than eight people in your household, add **\$4,540** for each additional person (\$4,720 if using the 2022 FPL Chart).

## HOW WILL PROGRAM BENEFITS BE MONITORED AND ASSESSED?

Per the Invest In Kids Act, any and all students in grades 3-11 that are awarded a scholarship must be annually assessed. Students in grades 3-8 will take the IAR, grade 9 will take the PSAT, grade 10 will take the PSAT 10, and grade 11 will take the SAT with Essay. For more information, please visit the Illinois State Board of Education's [website](#) or contact your student's school for more details.

## WHAT IF MY STUDENT DOES NOT PARTICIPATE IN TESTING?

ISBE regulates and enforces testing compliance. Scholarship Granting Organizations, like Empower Illinois, do not have the legal authority to make testing decisions. Empower Illinois operates under good faith, that unless otherwise notified by ISBE, that each participating school and family met the responsibilities of the Invest in Kids Act testing requirement for purposes of providing future scholarships.

## CAN I COMPLETE A TESTING WAIVER FOR MY STUDENT?

Yes, you may complete a waiver on the ISBE website for the [IAR test](#) (required for grades 3-8). You will need to work with your school contact to document your student's inability to complete the PSAT/PSAT10/SAT. Additional information may be found [here](#).

## **DO STUDENTS NEED TO BE ACCEPTED TO A PARTICIPATING SCHOOL BEFORE THEY CAN APPLY FOR A SCHOLARSHIP?**

Students may begin the scholarship application process prior to gaining acceptance to the school of their choice. Students however will be required to confirm enrollment at a participating school within 30 days (in some case 10 days) of receiving an award commitment.

## **CAN TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS BE USED AT ANY NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL?**

No, the scholarship funds can only be used to attend non-public schools that are recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). A list of those schools that are currently recognized by ISBE can be found [here](#).